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October 9, 1997

Mr. William F. Caton Secretary Federal Communications Commission 1919 M Street, Room 222 Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, Tariff F.C.C. No. 73, Transmittal No. 2633, CC Docket No. 97-158; Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, Tariff F.C.C. No. 73, Transmittal Nos. 2433 and 2449, CC Docket No. 95-140; Access Charge Reform, CC Docket No. 96-262

Dear Mr. Caton:

Since June 13, 1997, SWBT's Transmittal No. 2633, which proposed a reduction in prices in specific competitive bid situations, has been under suspension by the Commission. Although customers continue to make competitive choices using Requests For Proposals (RFPs) and other bidding arrangements, SWBT has been effectively prohibited from responding in kind. As demonstrated by SWBT in CC Docket No. 97-158, this delay is detrimental to the public interest.

This delay is overshadowed, however, by the Commission's failure to act on remand in CC Docket No. 95-140, Southwestern Bell Telephone Company Tariff F.C.C. No. 73, Transmittal Nos. 2433 and 2449. In CC Docket No. 95-140, the Commission rejected a previous filing by SWBT to decrease rates in specific competitive bid situations. SWBT asked the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to review this rejection. Nearly one year ago, on November 1, 1996, SWBT's Petition for Review was argued. Less than four weeks later, on November 26, 1996, the U.S. Court of Appeals remanded the Commission's ruling

¹ Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, Tariff F.C.C. No. 73, Transmittal No. 2633, Suspension Order, (DA 97-1251) (rel. Com. Car. Bur., June 13, 1997), (Suspension Order); Order Designating Issues for Investigation, (DA 97-1472) (rel. Com. Car. Bur., July 14, 1997), (Designation Order).

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"for a more coherent, and perhaps more forthright, explanation of its actions." Yet, today, no such explanation has been received.

The delay in each of these matters is especially puzzling given the FCC's long history of reducing regulation for services subject to competition. In CC Docket No. 86-421, Decreased Regulation of Certain Basic Telecommunications Services, the Commission recounted this history, stating:

As we observed in the Computer III Order, the conditions now prevailing in the telecommunications industry are quite different from those of 1983, . . . numerous new telecommunications suppliers are competing successfully with traditional dominant firms in providing the public with certain basic services and their substitutes. For some such offerings, competition is sufficiently intense that dominant carriers, as classified in Competitive Carrier, appear to have little or no market power. Accordingly, it appears that for these services, the full panoply of Title II regulations that this Commission has developed pursuant to its discretionary powers is not necessary to meet the goals of the Communications Act. Indeed, overly intrusive Title II regulation could hinder the efficient, low cost provision of such services to the public, because of the delay and additional costs inherent in complying with such regulation, as well as the potential creation of incentives for inefficient activity.³

Thus, even ten years ago, the Commission saw the need to reduce regulation for dominant carriers. In particular, the <u>Competitive Bid NPRM</u> in CC Docket No. 86-421 recognized that a market-specific approach should be used.⁴

Specifically, the <u>Competitive Bid NPRM</u> addressed reducing regulation for services obtained in competitive bidding situations:

Decreased regulation is warranted whenever the competitive process ensures that customers will receive the types of services they require at

² Southwestern Bell Telephone Company v. FCC, 100 F.3d, 1004, 1008 (D.C. Cir. 1996).

³ <u>Decreased Regulation of Certain Basic Telecommunications Services</u>, 2 FCC Rcd. 645 (1987) (<u>Competitive Bid NPRM</u>), at para. 8 (footnotes omitted).

⁴ Competitive Bid NPRM at para. 14.

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> reasonable prices. For example, business and governmental organizations often use a competitive bidding process to award contracts for telecommunications services that meet their specifications. If a dominant carrier wins such a contract, the rates contained in the tariff it files for these "contract services" generally are those specified in its winning contract bid. The fact that such a bidding process takes place indicates both the existence of competitive alternatives to the contract services that a dominant carrier proposes to furnish and the customer's willingness and ability to use the services of another provider. Moreover, a truly competitive bidding process operates both to prevent monopoly pricing and to encourage competitors of dominant carriers to compete for such contracts, by forcing such carriers to cut their rates in order to meet the competition for the customer's business. These observations and a Competitive Carrier-type analysis of the offering of contract services leads us to the tentative conclusions that there is a strong competitive submarket for such services and that, therefore, tariff regulation for contract services provided by dominant carriers should be streamlined.⁵

Thus, the Commission has already tentatively concluded, as a general matter, that in an RFP situation, no further proof of competition is necessary other than the fact that "such a bidding process takes place." This tentative conclusion confirms that SWBT need not show anything more to satisfy the first prong of the competitive necessity test in an RFP situation.

The <u>Competitive Bid NPRM</u> also answers the Bureau's current concerns over whether SWBT's Transmittal No. 2633 satisfies the second and third prongs of the competitive necessity doctrine.⁶ The Commission stated:

It appears that the bidding process itself operates to limit the market power of dominant carriers in the contract services submarket. By instituting such a process, the customer encourages entry into the bidding by other service providers by indicating its willingness to use their offerings if they can win the bidding process. Moreover, this process encourages all competitors to minimize their proposed charges

⁵ Competitive Bid NPRM at para. 35 (footnotes omitted).

⁶ "[T]he discounted offering response to competition without undue discrimination; and (3) the discount contributes to reasonable rates and efficient services for all users." Designation Order, at para. 24.

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for the service, and helps ensure that the customer who chooses to participate in this submarket will not be subject to supracompetitive pricing.⁷

The Commission also tentatively concluded that:

In most cases it appears that the bidding process itself serves to ensure the provision of an efficient set of services at reasonable prices for customers in this submarket, and thus only limited oversight by this Commission is necessary.⁸

While the proposals in the <u>Competitive Bid NPRM</u> showed great promise, the Commission failed to act on them. In 1990, the Commission decided to terminate CC Docket No. 86-421 on the ground, that the record compiled in the proceeding "has become stale." Thus, notwithstanding the strong words of encouragement from the <u>Competitive Bid NPRM</u>, and the absence of any finding to the contrary, CC Docket No. 86-421 granted no relief for competitive bids. Certainly, the competition indicated by the 1987 order has only become more apparent over time. There is no reason to withhold further relief today, even if there was any such reason in 1990.

The Commission must begin to remedy this delay. At a minimum, SWBT's Transmittal No. 2633 should be allowed to take effect immediately which could moot the need for further proceedings in CC Docket No. 95-140. A contrary result will require completion of the proceedings on remand in that docket. On a broader scale, all carriers must be allowed to file tariffs like SWBT's Transmittal No. 2633. This result can be accomplished in the context of the pricing flexibility phase of the Access Charge Reform proceeding.

Current events, the pending remand from the D.C. Circuit, and the record in the current access charge reform proceeding all require prompt action. The Commission has a prime opportunity to refresh the record and complete at least part of the work it began in CC Docket No. 86-421. The opportunity to "ensure the provision of an

⁷ Competitive Bid NPRM at para. 39.

⁸ Competitive Bid NPRM at para. 40.

⁹ <u>Decreased Regulation of Certain Basic Telecommunications Services</u>, 5 FCC Rcd. 5412 (1990) at para. 3.

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efficient set of services at reasonable prices for customers" must not be delayed any longer.

Very truly yours,

Thomas A. Pajda

Attorney

cc: All parties of record

¹⁰ Competitive Bid NPRM at para. 40.

Certificate of Service

I, Elaine Temper, hereby certify Southwestern Bell Telephone
Company's filing on CC Docket No. 97-158, Transmittal No. 2633, CC Docket No. 95-140, Transmittal Nos. 2433 and 2449 and CC Docket No. 96-262 has been filed this 10th day of October, 1997 to the Parties of Record.

Elaine Temper

October 10, 1997

COMPETITIVE PRICING DIVISION (2 CYS)
COMMON CARRIER BUREAU
ROOM 518
1919 M STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20554

INTERNATIONAL TRANSCRIPTION SERVICE 1231 20TH STREET GROUND FLOOR WASHINGTON, DC 20036

GEORGIA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION ATTENTION: MR BB KNOWLES DIRECTOR UTILITIES DIVISION 244 WASHINGTON STREET SW/SOB — SUITE 266 ATLANTA GEORGIA 30334-5701

LYMAN C WELCH 190 S LASALLE STREET #3100 CHICAGO IL 60603

PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF OREGON 550 CAPITOL ST NE SALEM OR 97310-1380 PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF TEXAS 1702 N CONGRESS AVE P O BOX 13326 AUSTIN TX 78711-3326

GVNW INC/MANAGEMENT KENNETH T BURCHETT VICE PRESIDENT 7125 SW HAMPTON PORTLAND OR 97223

PENNSYLVANIA INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS SCOTT J RUBIN ESQ 3 LOST CREEK DRIVE SELINSGROVE PA 17870

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
LAWRENCE D CROCKER III
ACTING GENERAL COUNSEL
717 14TH STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20005

NORTHERN ARKANSAS TELEPHONE COMPANY INC STEVEN G SANDERS - PRESIDENT 301 EAST MAIN STREET FLIPPIN AR 72634 AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
CAROL C HENDERSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ALA WASHINGTON OFFICE
1301 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW SUITE 403
WASHINGTON DC 20004

ALLIED ASSOCIATED PARTNERS LP
ALLIED COMMUNICATIONS GROUP
GELD INFORMATION SYSTEMS
CURTIS T WHITE
MANAGING PARTNER
4201 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW - #402
SUITE 402
WASHINGTON DC 20008-1158

EDWARD HAYES JR ESQ 1155 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW THIRD FLOOR WASHINGTON DC 20036 RONALD DUNN
PRESIDENT
INFORMATION INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
1625 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE NW
SUITE 700
WASHINGTON DC 20036

DANIEL J WEITZNER
ALAN B DAVIDSON
CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND TECHNOLOGY
1634 EYE STREET NW
SUITE 1100
WASHINGTON DC 20006

JOSEPH S PAYKEL
ANDREW JAY SCHWARTZMAN
GIGI B SOHN
MEDIA ACCESS PROJECT
1707 L STREET NW
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON DC 20036

GARY M EPSTEIN
JAMES H BARKER
LATHAM & WATKINS
COUNSEL FOR BELLSOUTH CORPORATION &
BELLSOUTH TELECOMMUNICATIONS INC
1001 PENNYSLVANIA AVENUE NW
SUITE 1300
WASHINGTON DC 20004-2505

CITIZENS UTILITIES COMPANY RICHARD M TETTELBAUM ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL SUITE 500 1400 16TH STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20036

JACK KRUMHOLTZ
LAW AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT
MICROSOFT CORPORATION
SUITE 600
5335 WISCONSIN AVENUE NW
WASHINGTON DC 20015

NATIONAL CABLE TELEVISION ASSOCIATION INC DANIEL L BRENNER DAVID L NICOLL 1724 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20036 EXCEL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INC THOMAS K CROWE MICHAEL B ADAMS LAW OFFICES OF THOMAS K CROWE PC 2300 M STREET NW SUITE 800 WASHINGTON DC 20037

CABLE & WIRELESS INC RACHEL J ROTHSTEIN 8219 LEESBURG PIKE VIENNA VA 22182

DANNY E ADAMS
EDWARD A YORKGITIS JR
KELLEY DRYE & WARREN LLP
ATTORNEYS FOR CABLE & WIRELESS INC
1200 19TH STREET NW SUITE 500
WASHINGTON DC 20036

TIMOTHY R GRAHAM ROBERT G BERGER JOSEPH SANDRI WINSTAR COMMUNICATIONS INC 1146 19TH STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20036

DANA FRIX
MARK SIEVERS
SWIDLER & BERLIN CHTD
WINSTAR COMMUNICATIONS INC
3000 K STREET NW SUITE 300
WASHINGTON DC 20007

DANA FRIX
TAMAR HAVERTY
SWIDLER & BERLIN CHARTERED
COUNSEL FOR TELCO COMMUNICATIONS GROUP INC
3000 K STREET NW SUITE 300
WASHINGTON DC 20007

AMERICA ONLINE INC
WILLIAM W BURRINGTON
JILL LESSER
COUNSEL FOR AMERICA ONLINE INC
1101 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON DC 20036

DONNA N LAMPERT
JAMES A KIRKLAND
JENNIFER A PURVIS
MINTZ LEVIN COHN FERRIS GLOVSKY
AND POPEO P C
COUNSEL FOR AMERICA ONLINE INC
701 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW
SUITE 900
WASHINGTON DC 20004

MICHAEL J SHORTLEY III ATTORNEY FOR FRONTIER CORPORATION 180 SOUTH CLINTON AVENUE ROCHESTER NEW YORK 14646 MICHAEL S FOX DIRECTOR REGULATORY AFFAIRS JOHN STAURULAKIS INC 6315 SEABROOK ROAD SEABROOK MARYLAND 20706 ROBERT S TONGREN
CONSUMERS' COUNSEL
OHIO CONSUMERS' COUNSEL
77 SOUTH HIGH STREET 15TH FLOOR
COLUMBUS OHIO 43266-0550

NATIONAL EXCHANGE CARRIER ASSOCIATION INC JOANNE SALVATORE BOCHIS PERRY S GOLDSCHEIN 100 SOUTH JEFFERSON ROAD WHIPPANY NEW JERSEY 07981

OZARKS TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE P O BOX 5958 SPRINGFIELD MO 65801 SDN USERS ASSOCIATION INC P O BOX 4014 BRIDGEWATER NJ 08807

CHARLES D GRAY
JAMES BRADFORD RAMSAY
NATIONAL ASSOCITION OF REGULATORY
UTILITY COMMISSIONERS
1201 CONSTITUTION AVENUE SUITE 1102
POST OFFICE BOX 684
WASHINGTON DC 20044

MICHAEL S PABIAN LARRY A PECK COUNSEL FOR AMERITECH ROOM 4H82 2000 WEST AMERITECH CENTER DRIVE HOFFMAN ESTATES IL 60196-1025

TCA INC
TELECOMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANTS
F STEPHEN LAMB MAS MANAGER
3617 BETTY DRIVE
SUITE 1
COLORADO SPRINGS CO 80917-5909

SCOTT L SMITH VICE PRESIDENT OF ALASKA TELEPHONE ASSOCIATION 4341 B STREET SUITE 304 ANCHORAGE AK 99503

WAYNE LEIGHTON PHD SENIOR ECONOMIST CITIZENS FOR A SOUND ECONOMY FOUNDATION 1250 H STREET NW SUITE 700 WASHINGTON DC 20005 BETTY D MONTGOMERY ATTORNEY GENERAL OF OHIO STEVEN T NOURSE ASST ATTY GENERAL PUBLIC UTILITIES SECTION 180 EAST BROAD STREET COLUMBUS OH 43215-3793 ICG TELECOM GROUP INC CINDY Z SCHONHAUT 9605 EAST MAROON CIRCLE ENGLEWOOD CO 80112 ALBERT H KRAMER
DICKSTEIN SHAPIRO MORIN & OSHINSKY LLP
ATTORNEY FOR ICG TELECOM GROUP INC
2101 L STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20037-1526

RONALD J BINZ - PRESIDENT
DEBRA R BERLYN - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
JOHN WINDHAUSEN JR - GENERAL COUNSEL
COMPETITION POLICY INSTITUTE
1156 15TH STREET NW SUITE 310
WASHINGTON DC 20005

GENERAL COMMUNICATION INC KATHY L SHOBERT DIRECTOR FEDERAL AFFAIRS 901 15TH STREET NW SUITE 900 WASHINGTON DC 20005

MCI TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION BRADLEY C STILLMAN — SENIOR COUNSEL 1801 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20006 SPRINT CORPORATION LEON M KESTENBAUM JAY C KEITHLEY H RICHARD JUHNKE 1850 M STREET NW 11TH FLOOR WASHINGTON DC 20036

SUE D BLUMENFELD
THOMAS JONES
WILKIE FARR & GALLAGHER
COUNSEL FOR SPRINT CORPORATION
THREE LAFAYETTE CENTRE
1155 21ST STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20036

WORLDCOM INC CATHERINE R SLOAN 1120 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20036-3902

WORLDCOM INC RICHARD J HEITMANN 515 EAST AMITE JACKSON MS 39201-2702 ALEX J HARRIS WORLDCOM INC 33 WHITEHALL STREET 15TH FLOOR NEW YORK NY 10004 PETER A ROHRBACH
DAVID L SIERADZKI
F WILLIAM LEBEAU
HOGAN & HARTSON L.L.P.
555 13TH STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20004-1109

AMERICAN PETROLEUM INSTITUTE
KELLER AND HECKMAN LLP
WAYNE V BLACK
C DOUGLAS JARRETT
SUSAN M HAFELI
PAULA DEZA
1001 G STREET NW
SUITE 500 WEST
WASHINGTON DC 20001

AD HOC TELECOMMUNICATIONS USERS COMMITTEE COLLEEN BOOTHBY
JAMES S BLASZAK
KEVIN S DILALLO
SASHA FIELD
LEVINE BLASZAK BLOCK & BOOTHBY
1300 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW
SUITE 500
WASHINGTON DC 20036

COMPETITIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION GENEVIEVE MORELLI EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL COUNSEL 1900 M STREET NW SUITE 800 WASHINGTON DC 20036-3508

ROBERT AAMOTH
KELLEY DRYE & WARREN
ATTYS FOR COMPETITIVE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOC
1200 19TH STREET NW
SUITE 500
WASHINGTON DC 20036

CHARLES C HUNTER
CATHERINE M HANNAN
HUNTER & MOW PC
TELECOMMUNICATIONS RESELLERS ASSOCIATION
1620 I STREET NW
SUITE 701
WASHINGTON DC 20006

BELL ATLANTIC TELEPHONE COMPANY EDWARD SHAKIN 1320 NORTH COURT HOUSE ROAD EIGHTH FLOOR ARLINGTON VA 22201

NYNEX TELEPHONE COMPANIES JOSEPH DIBELLA 1300 I STREET NW SUITE 400 WEST WASHINGTON DC 20005

UNITED STATES TELEPHONE ASSOCIATION MARY MCDERMOTT LINDA KENT LINDA KENT KEITH TOWNSEND HANCE HANEY 1401 H STREET NW SUITE 600 WASHINGTON DC 20005

FLEISCHMAN AND WALSH LLP COUNSEL TO LCI INTERNATIONAL TELECOM CORP 1400 SIXTEENTH STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20036 ANNE K BINGAMAN
DOUG KNKOPH
LCI INTERNATIONAL TELECOM CORP
8180 GREENSBORO DRIVE SUITE 800
MCLEAN VIRGINIA 22102

CHAD S CAMPBELL EUGENE D COHEN BAILEY CAMPBELL PLC 649 NORTH SECOND AVENUE PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85003

COMPETITIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION GENEVIEVE MORELLI 1900 M STREET NW SUITE 800 WASHINGTON DC 20036-3508 ROBERT AAMOTH KELLEY DRYE & WARREN 1200 19TH STREET NW SUITE 500 WASHINGTON DC 20036

THOMAS F O'NEILL III
WILLIAM SINGLE IV
MCI TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORP
1133 NINETEENTH STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20036

DONALD B VERILLI JR
JENNER & BLOCK
MCI COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION
JENNER & BLOCK
601 THIRTEENTH STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20005

ACC LONG DISTANCE CORP DANA FRIX TAMAR HAVERTY SWIDLER & BERLIN CHARTERED 3000 K STREET NW SUITE 300 WASHINGTON DC 20007 IXC LONG DISTANCE INC
GARY L MANN
DIRECTOR - REGULATORY AFFAIRS
IXC LONG DISTANCE INC
98 SAN JACINTO SUITE 700
AUSTIN TX 78701

AT&T CORP MARK C ROSENBLUM PETER H JACOBY JUDY SELLO ROOM 3245G1 295 NORTH MAPLE AVENUE BASKING RIDGE NJ 07920 AT&T CORP GENE C SCHAERR DAVID L LAWSON SCOTT M BOHANNON JAMES P YOUNG 1722 EYE STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20006 ROBERT M MCDOWELL
BRIAN A CUTE
HELEIN & ASSOCIATES PC
COUNSEL FOR
TELECOMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION
8180 GREENSBORO DRIVE
SUITE 700
MCLEAN VA 22102

TELECON LLC
FAYE F HENRIS
KIERAN T MAYS
AMERICA'S CARRIERS TELECOMMUNICATION ASSOC
8180 GREENSBORO DRIVE
SUITE 700
MCLEAN VA 22102

ANNE U MACCLINTOCK
VICE PRESIDENT REGULATORY AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC POLICY
THE SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND TELEPHONE COMPANY
227 CHURCH STREET
NEW HAVEN CT 06510

FROST & JACOBS
THOMAS E TAYLOR
CHRISTOPHER J WILSON
ATTORNEYS FOR CINCINNATI BELL
TELEPHONE COMPANY
2500 PNC CENTER
201 EAST FIFTH STREET
CINCINNATI OHIO 45202

U S WEST INC
ROBERT B MCKENNA
RICHARD A KARRE
COLEEN M EGAN HELMREICH
ATTORNEYS FOR U S WEST
SUITE 700
1020 19TH STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20036

JOE D EDGE
TINA M PIDGEON
DRINKER BIDDLE & REATH
ATTORNEYS FOR
PUERTO RICO TELEPHONE COMPANY
901 15TH STREET NW
SUITE 900
WASHINGTON DC 20005

MICHAEL S PABIAN LARRY A PECK COUNSEL FOR AMERITECH ROOM 4H82 2000 WEST AMERITECH CENTER DRIVE HOFFMAN ESTATES IL 60196-1025

PACIFIC TELESIS GROUP MARLIN D ARD NANCY C WOOLF 140 NEW MONTGOMERY STREET SAN FRANCISCO CA 94105

PACIFIC TELESIS GROUP MARGARET E GARBER 1275 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20004 GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION EMILY C HEWITT GENERAL COUNSEL 18TH & F STREETS NW ROOM 4002 WASHINGTON DC 20405 OFFICE OF THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL US ARMY LITIGATION CENTER 901 N STUART STREET SUITE 713 ARLINGTON VA 22202-1837 JOHN ROTHER ESQ DIRECTOR LEGISLATION AND PUBLIC POLICY AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED PERSONS 601 E STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20049

JAMES LOVE DIRECTOR CONSUMER PROJECT ON TECHNOLOGY P O BOX 19367 WASHINGTON DC 20036 INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION BRIAN R MOIR MOIR & HARDMAN 2000 L STREET NW SUITE 512 WASHINGTON DC 20036-4907

ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC TECHNOLOGY DR BARBARA O'CONNOR CHAIR GERALD DEPO PRESDENT 901 15TH STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20005

DAVID J NEWBURGER NEWBURGER & VOSSMEYER ONE METROPOLITAN SQUARE SUITE 2400 ST LOUIS MISSOURI 63102

MARTHA S HOGERTY OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC COUNSEL P O BOX 7800 JEFFERSON CITY MO 65102 JACK SHREVE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC COUNSEL 111 W MADISON ST #812 TALLAHASSEE FL 32399-1400

MIKE TRAVIESO
OFFICE OF PEOPLE'S COUNSEL
6TH ST PAUL STREET SUITE 2102
BALTIMORE MD 21202

IRWIN A POPOWSKY OFFICE OF CONSUMER ADVOCATE 1425 STRAWBERRY SQUARE HARRISBURG PA 17120 BLOSSOM PERETZ DIVISION OF RATEPAYER ADVOCATE P O BOX 46005 NEWARK NJ 06101 JAMES MARET
OFFICE OF CONSUMER ADVOCATE
LUCAS STATE OFFICE BLDG 4TH FLOOR
DES MOINES IA 50319

ELIZABETH A NOEL OFFICE OF THE PEOPLE'S COUNSEL 1133 15TH ST NW SUITE 500 WASHINGTON DC 20005 ROB MANIFOLD
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
900 4TH AVENUE SUITE 2000
SEATTLE WA 98164

REGINA COSTA TOWARD UTILITY RATE NORMALIZATION 625 POLK STREET SUITE 403 SAN FRANCISCO CA 94102 ERIC SWANSON
OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL
SUITE 1200 WCL TOWER
445 MINNESOTA ST
ST PAUL MN 55101-2130

ANNE BECKER
OFFICE OF UTILITY CONSUMER COUNSELOR
100 N SENATE AVE ROOM N501
INDIANAPOLIS IN 46204-2208

PETER ARTH JR
LIONEL B WILSON
MARY MACK ADU
ATTYS FOR STATE OF CALIFORNIA &
THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF CA
HELEN M MICKIEWICZ
505 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94102

ALABAMA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION MARY NEWMEYER FEDERAL AFFAIRS ADVISER P O BOX 991 MONTGOMERY AL 36101 COUNSEL FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
THOMAS K CROWE
DAVID H SCHWARTZ
LAW OFFICES OF THOMAS K CROWE PC
2300 M STREET NW
SUITE 800
WASHINGTON DC 20037

MAUREEN O HELMER
GENERAL COUNSEL
NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE
THREE EMPIRE STATE PLAZA
ALBANY NY 12223-1350

OFFICE OF PUBLIC UTILITY COUNSEL LAURIE PAPPAS DEPUTY PUBLIC COUNSEL 1701 N CONGRESS AVE 9-180 P O BOX 12397 AUSTIN TX 78711-2397

OFFICE OF PUBLIC UTILITY COUNSEL SUZI RAY MCCLELLAN PUBLIC COUNSEL RICK GUZMAN ASSISTANT PUBLIC COUNSEL 1701 N CONGRESS AVE 9-180 P O BOX 12397 AUSTIN TX 78711-2397

JAMES A BURG
PAM NELSON
SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
STATE CAPITOL
PIERRE SOUTH DAKOTA 57501-5070

R MICHAEL SENKOWSKI JEFFREY S LINDER GREGORY J VOGT WILEY REIN & FIELDING 1776 K STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20006

GTE SERVICE CORPORATION
WARD W WUESTE
GAIL L POLIVY
1850 M STREET NW
SUITE 1200
WASHINGTON DC 20036

RICHARD HEMSTAD
WILLIAM R GILLIS
WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION
1300 S EVERGREEN PARK DR
P O BOX 47250
OLYMPIA WA 98504-7250

MICHAEL T SKRIVAN HARRIS SKRIVAN & ASSOCIATES LLC 8801 SOUTH YALE SUITE 220 TULSA OK 74137

AIRTOUCH COMMUNICATIONS INC KATHLEEN Q ABERNATHY DAVID A GROSS 1818 N STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20036

PAMELA J RILEY AIRTOUCH COMMUNICATIONS INC ONE CALIFORNIA STREET 9TH FLOOR SAN FRANCISCO CA 94111 PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY
ASSOCIATION
MARK J GOLDEN
ROBERT L HOGGARTH
MARY MADIGAN
500 MONTGOMERY STREET
SUITE 700
ALEXANDRIA VA 223214-1561

CENTENNIAL CELLULAR CORPORATION CHRISTOPHER W SAVAGE COLE RAYWID & BRAVERMAN LLP 1919 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW SUITE 200 WASHINGTON DC 20006

ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES
RICHARD J METZGER
EMILY M WILLIAMS
1200 19TH STREET NW
SUITE 560
WASHINGTON DC 20036

TELEPORT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP INC TERESA MARRERO SENIOR REGULATORY COUNSEL TELEPORT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP INC TWO TELEPORT DRIVE STATEN ISLAND NY 10311

SPECTRANET INTERNATIONAL INC
GLENN B MANISHIN
CHRISTINE A MAILLOUX
BLUMENFELD & COHEN - TECHNOLOGY LAW GROUP
1615 M STREET NW SUITE 700
WASHINGTON DC 20036

TIME WARNER COMMUNICATIONS HOLDINGS BRIAN CONBOY THOMAS JONES GUNNAR HALLEY WILLKIE FARR & GALLAGHER THREE LAFAYETTE CENTER 1155 21ST STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20036

TELE-COMMUNICATIONS INC RANDALL B LOWE PIPER & MARBURY LLP 1200 19TH STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20036 RURAL TELEPHONE FINANCE COOPERATIVE JOHN J LIST SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT MEMBER SERVICES 2201 COOPERATIVE WAY HERNDON VA 20171

WESTERN ALLIANCE
BENJAMIN H DICKENS JR
GERARD J DUFFY
BLOOSTON MORDKOFSKY JACKSON & DICKENS
2120 L STREET NW SUITE 300
WASHINGTON DC 20037

TDS TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION MARGOT SMILEY HUMPHREY KOTEEN & NAFTALIN LLP 1150 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW SUITE 1000 WASHINGTON DC 20036

ITC
DAVID A IRWIN
TARA S BECHT
IRWIN CAMPBELL & TANNENWALD PC
1739 RHODE ISLAND AVE NW STE 200
WASHINGTON DC 20036-3101

INDEPENDENT TELEPHONE & TELECOMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE
DIANE SMITH
ALLTEL CORPORATE SERVICES INC
655 15TH STREET NW SUITE 220
WASHINGTON DC 20005-5701

INDEPENDENT TELEPHONE & TELECOMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE
DAVID W ZESIGER
1300 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW
SUITE 600
WASHINGTON DC 20036

INDEPENDENT TELEPHONE & TELECOMMUNICATIONS
ALLIANCE
RICHARD P BRESS
MICHAEL S WROBLEWSKI
LATHAM & WATKINS
1001 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW
SUITE 1300
WASHINGTON DC 20004-2505

KENT LARSEN
CATHEY HUTTON AND ASSOCIATES
2711 LBJ FREEWAY SUITE 560
DALLAS TX 75234

ALLTEL TELEPHONE SERVICES CORPORATION CAROLYN C HILL 655 15TH STREET NW SUITE 220 WASHINGTON DC 20005

FREDERICK & WARINNER LLC CLINT FREDERICK 10901 WEST 84TH TERRANCE SUITE 101 LENEXA KANSAS 66214-1631 ROSEVILL TELEPHONE COMPANY GEORGE PETRUTSAS PAUL J FELDMAN FLETCHER HEALD & HILDRETH PLC 11TH FLOOR 1300 NORTH 17TH STREET ROSSLYN VA 22209

MINNESOTA INDEPENDENT COALITION RICHARD J JOHNSON MICHAEL J BRADLEY MOSS & BARNETT 4800 NORWEST CENTER 90 SOUTH SEVENTH STREET MINNEAPOLIS MN 55402-4129

NRTA
MARGOT SMILEY HUMPHREY
KOTEEN & NAFTALIN LLP
1150 CONNECTICUT AVE NW
SUITE 1000
WASHINGTON DC 20036

NTCA
DAVID COSSON
L MARIE GUILLORY
2626 PENNSYLVANIA AVE NW
WASHINGTON DC 20037

OPASTCO
LISA M ZAINA
KENNETH JOHNSON
21 DUPONT CIRCLE NW
SUITE 700
WASHINGTON DC 20036

JEFFREY F BECK
JILLISA BONFMAN
BECK & ACKERMAN
FOUR EMBARCADARO CENTER
SUITE 760
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94111

ALIANT COMMUNICATIONS CO ROBERT A MAZER ALBERT SHULDINER VINSON & ELKINS 1455 PENNSYLVANIA AVE NW WASHINGTON DC 20004-1008

COMPUSERVE INC & PRODIGY SERVICES CORP RANDOLPH J MAY BONDING YEE SUTHERLAND ASBILL & BRENNAN 1275 PENNSYLVANIA AVE NW WASHINGTON DC 20004-2404 ILLUMINET
STEPHEN G KRASKIN
SYLVIA LESSE
THOMAS J MOORMAN
KRASKIN & LESSE
2120 L STREET NW SUITE 530
WASHINGTON DC 20037

THE INTERACTIVE SERVICES ASSOCIATION EDWIN N LAVERGNE J THOMAS NOLAN GINSBURG FELDMAN AND BRESS CHTD 1250 CONNECTICUT AVE NW WASHINGTON DC 20036 MICROSOFT CORPORATION
JACK KRUMHOLTZ
LAW AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT
MICROSOFT CORPORATION
SUITE 600
5335 WISCONSIN AVE NW
WASHINGTON DC 20015

MICROSOFT CORPORATION
STANLEY M GORINSON
WILLIAM H DAVENPORT
PRESTON GATES ELLIS & ROUVELAS MEEDS
1735 NEW YORK AVE NW
WASHINGTON DC 20006

COMMERCIAL INTERNET EXCHANGE ASSOCIATION ROBERT D COLLET BARBARA A DOOLEY RONALD L PLESSER MARK J OCONNOR JAMES J HALPERT PIPER & MARBURY LLP 1200 NINETEENTH ST NW STE 700 WASHINGTON DC 20036

BANKERS CLEARING HOUSE MASTERCARD INTL INC & VISA USA INC
HENRY D LEVINE
LAURA F H MCDONALD
LEVINE BLASZAK BLOCK & BOOTHBY
1300 CONNECTICUT AVE NW
SUITE 500
WASHINGTON DC 20036

BETTY D. MONTGOMERY ATTORNEY GENERAL OF OHIO PUBLIC UTILITIES SECTION 180 EAST BROAD STREET COLUMBUS OH 43215-3793

LCI INTERNATIONAL CORP NC GREGORY M CASEY DOUGLAS W KINKOPH 8180 GREENSBORO DRIVE SUITE 800 MCLEAN VA 22102

TERRY MICHAEL BANKS COUNSEL ICG TELECOM GROUP 1303 SAWBRIDGE WAY RESTON VA 22094

THE RURAL TELEPHONE COALITION MARGOT SMILEY HUMPHREY KOTEEN & NAFTALIN LLP 1150 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW SUITE 1000 WASHINGTON DC 20036

THE RURAL TELEPHONE COALITION DAVID COSSON L MARIE GUILLORY 2626 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20037

THE RURAL TELEPHONE COALITION LISA M ZAINA KENNETH JOHNSON 21 DUPONT CIRCLE NW SUITE 700 WASHINGTON DC 20036 ROSEVILLE TELEPHONE COMPANY FLETCHER HEALD & HILDRETH PLC GEORGE PETRUTSAS PAUL J FELDMAN 11TH FLOOR 1300 NORTH 17TH STREET ROSSLYN VA 22209

TENNESSEE REGULATORY AUTHORITY STAFF CHRISTOPHER KLEIN CHIEF UTILITY RATE DIVISION 460 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY NASHVILLE TN 37243-0505 DAVID S J BROWN E MOLLY LEAHY NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA 529 14TH STREET NW SUITE 440 WASHINGTON DC 20045 LESLA LEHTONEN
ATTORNEY FOR
CALIFORNIA CABLE TELEVISION ASSOCIATION
4341 PIEDMONT AVENUE
OAKLAND CA 94611

NYSERNET INC
JAMES BRENNAN
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF GOV SERVICES
RENSSELAER TECHNOLOGY PARK
TROY NY 12180-7698

CYNTHIA B MILLER SENIOR ATTORNEY FORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION 2540 SHUMARD OAK BOULEVARD TALLAHASSEE FL 32399-0850 SONETECH INC W FRED SEIGNEUR PRESIDENT 109 KALE AVENUE STERLING VA 20164

DAVID J NEWBURGER\
NEWBURGER & VOSSMEYER
COUNSEL FOR
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ADULT AND
CONTINUING EDUCATION
ONE METROPOLITAN SQUARE SUITE 2400
ST LOUIS MISSOURI 63102

CATHERINE R SLOAN
RICHARD L FRUCHTERMAN III
RICHARD S WHITT
WORLDCOM INC
1120 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON DC 20036

RICHARD J HEITMANN WORLDCOM INC 515 EAST AMITE JACKSON MS 39201-2702 ALEX J HARRIS WORLDCOM INC 33 WHITEHALL STREET 15TH FLOOR NEW YORK NY 10004

PETER A ROHRBACH
DAVID L SIERADZKI
F WILLIAM LEBEAU
HOGAN & HARTSON LLP
WORLDCOM INC
555 13TH STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20004-1109

TEXAS OFFICE OF PUBLIC UTILITY COUNSEL LAURIE PAPPAS DEPUTY PUBLIC COUNSEL 1701 N CONGRESS AVENUE 9-180 P O BOX 12397 AUSTIN TX 78711-2397 COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA MORTON BAHR PRESIDENT 501 3RD STREET NW WASHINGTON DC 20001 KANSAS CORPORATION COMMISSION 1500 SW ARROWHEAD RD TOPEKA KS 66604-4027

THOMAS B WEAVER
ATTORNEY - GTE MIDWEST INCORPORATED
ARMSTRONG TEASDALE SCHLAFLY & DAVIS
ONE METROPOLITAN SQUARE SUITE 2600
ST LOUIS MISSOURI 63102

JULES M PERLBERG ONE FIRST NATIONAL PLAZA CHICAGO IL 60603

RCN TELECOM SERVICES INC RUSSELL M BLAU TAMAR E HAVERTY SWIDLER & BERLIN CHARTERED 3000 K STREET NW SUITE 300 WASHINGTON DC 20007 NATIONAL EMERGENCY NUMBER ASSN JÁMES R HOBSON FREDERIC L WOOD (ATTY OF RECORD) DONELAN CLEARY WOOD & MASTER PRICE CAP PERFORMANCE REVIEW ORDER 1100 NEW YORK AVENUE NW #750 WASHINGTON DC 20005-3934